

POLICY IDEAS

for community nutrition and physical activity



FROM ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES TO PUBLIC POLICIES:

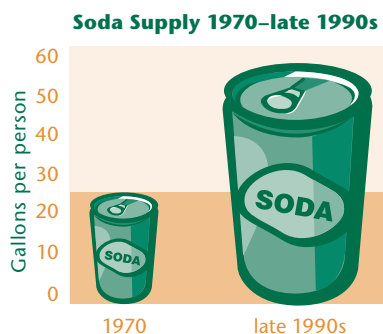
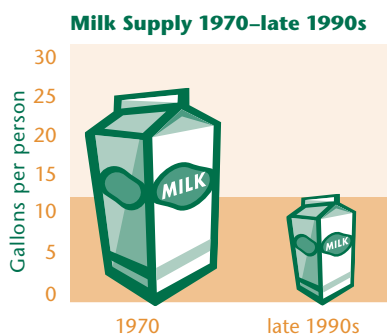
Local Strategies to Increase Healthy Eating & Physical Activity

The Impact of Unhealthy Eating and Physical Inactivity

Unhealthy eating and physical inactivity, taken together, are at the top of leading causes of preventable deaths in the U.S., second only to tobacco use.¹ In addition, a major source of disability and morbidity is due to physical inactivity, with nearly 25 percent of the U.S. population described as sedentary and obese Americans numbering one in five, a 61 percent increase since 1991.^{2, 3, 4}

- U.S. food availability from 1970–1996 increased 500 calories to 3,800 calories per capita and fat by 25 percent, but the availability of fruits and vegetables increased by only nine-tenths of a serving.^{5, 6}
- Our beverage consumption habits have changed for the worse:
 - Milk supply decreasing from 25.5 to 8.5 gallons per capita
 - Soft drink supply more than doubling from 24.3 to 53 gallons per capita.⁵
- Diet-related diseases are estimated to cost approximately \$117 billion annually (\$61 billion direct and \$56 billion indirect).⁷

To help combat this, the National Cancer Institute spends \$1 million annually advertising its 5 a Day campaign to promote fruit and vegetable intake. It's a monumental battle, however, to compete with the billions spent on snack foods, soft drinks and restaurant advertising, especially when \$67 million alone is spent annually just to advertise M&M candies.⁸



Source: Nestle, M. (2002). *Food politics: How the food industry influences nutrition and health*. (p. 9) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

The policy brief begins with an overview of the issue, a brief rationale for policy, followed by case studies, a selection of current healthy eating and physical activity policies throughout the U.S., and a resource section. Its intended audiences include city councils, boards, commissions and nutrition/physical activity policy advocates at the local level. It's important to note that there are more examples of food policies than physical activity policies. They are positioned jointly because of their necessary importance together for optimal physical health. This policy brief was made possible with funds from the *California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families*, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Program and The California Endowment, through the California Department of Health Services.

This policy brief is a companion document to the Center for Civic Partnerships' planning guide, *Fresh Ideas for Community Nutrition and Physical Activity*. The planning guide is based on six healthy eating and physical activity programs in six California Healthy Cities.

Center for Civic Partnerships

California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families

Public Health Institute

Residents depend on their communities for safe and affordable options for physical activity and good nutrition.



community-based organizations, neighborhood associations, advocacy groups, schools, faith groups, health professionals and commissions. Local government, however, is in the unique position to implement community-based nutrition and physical activity policies, programs and improvements through its existing departments of planning, housing, parks and recreation, and community services through the following:

- installing/improving sidewalks;
- offering adult education classes on healthy cooking and gardening;
- providing space and resources for community gardens; and
- creating safe and inviting downtowns for walking.^{10, 11}

Why Policy?

A policy approach to preventing disease confers significant benefit on the population at large.⁹ Nonetheless, to be most effective, policy must be part of a multi-dimensional approach that includes social marketing, education, environmental design and regulation. Obesity as a result of poor nutrition and physical activity currently receives daily media attention. With this comes awareness and discussions on what can be done to promote change. Residents depend on their communities for safe and affordable options for physical activity and good nutrition. From informal administrative policies to local ordinances, local governments and their partners can provide a range of healthful alternatives for youth and families (e.g., serving healthier foods at city meetings, providing nutritious school cafeteria options and physical activity time, and supporting community gardens).

Who Can Be Involved?

Policy development is frequently done in response to constituent demands. Local partnerships are vital to success. Community input may come from youth and senior groups,

Policy Development and Implementation

Before the initial draft is written, there must be a sense of support by potential stakeholders. A public relations effort and relationship with the media is key in getting coverage of the proposed policy.

The more ownership a community has of a policy, the better the chances of its implementation.

Kate Clayton, Project Coordinator, City of Berkeley Food Policy Council

A policy's adoption is not enough to enact change. It's important that policies are consistent with community circumstances, and they need to be communicated and actively enforced to have an effect.¹² Policy work is a long-term process that requires a significant commitment, with the equally significant benefits of more lasting community change.

Once implemented, it's essential to collect data against which to monitor effectiveness (e.g., benchmarks). While often tedious, it is necessary for continued support and ongoing improvements.

Case Studies

Escondido, California

Interim Land Use and Garden Water Use Policies

Escondido, a California Healthy City since 1992, is located in the coastal mountains of northern San Diego County, California. The median income for the city's more than 130,000 residents, 40% of whom are Latino, is \$43,000.¹³ The city is emerging as a regional economic leader, although its economic base is largely comprised of small businesses.

Interim Land Use Policy

Escondido created the *Cosecha Nuestra* ("Our Harvest") program to address the lack of open space for gardening and recreation in apartment complexes for the residents located in South Escondido, an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Many of these residents do not own a car, and because transportation is limited, they do not have easy access to supermarkets, parks and other recreational

The notion of community improvement and reframing vacant land as a community asset is not a hard concept to sell. There is now a grassroots demand for community gardens.

Jerry Van Leeuwen, Director, Community Development Block Grant, City of Escondido

facilities. *Cosecha Nuestra* established a Community Nutrition Council comprised of representatives from local schools, the refuse company, hospital, faith organizations, area food banks, local businesses, the Parent-Teacher Association, San Diego State University, and the Women, Infants and Children's program (WIC). The Nutrition Council is accomplishing its mission of increasing residents' access to fresh nutritious produce through community gardens, education on nutrition, food safety and lifestyle modification, and by developing itself as a community educational resource.

The Nutrition Council's mission led to the acquisition of land for two community gardens. The first was sited on land from an undeveloped park that the city leased for \$1 per year; and the second, through a donation of land by the Vietnam Veterans of San Diego. The gardens have provided a meeting place where gardeners have taken advantage of varied opportunities such as composting classes, connecting with social service representatives, and working to make housing more affordable to residents through programs



The Escondido gardens have provided an abundance of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs from over 145 garden plots.

designed to decrease their spending in other ways (e.g., growing vs. bringing home purchased food decreases grocery expenses). The gardens have provided an abundance of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs from over 145 garden plots, a youth garden, and a large plot for oversized crops to over 600 Escondido residents. The gardens' committee structure provides opportunities for community participation and individual leadership. The committees are elected by community gardeners who help to coordinate garden projects, plan festivals, set rules, enforce contracts and conduct gardening and program presentations.

It was through the success of these gardens that the concept for Adopt-A-Lot came to fruition. Escondido residents, master gardeners and committee members who wanted to develop additional community gardens proposed the program to the City Council and it was approved. Their plan was to allow individuals, neighborhood groups and other organizations interim use of vacant land for recreational or community use through a mutual agreement by the landowner, user groups and the city. Adopt-A-Lot also offers an expedited land use approval process and no-fee city permit that waives customary zoning requirements and regulations.

The policy has the ancillary benefits of instigating new programs and building interest in community gardens and vacant lot beautification. Escondido is in the process of setting aside garden space in low-income communities; has leased additional vacant land for \$1 a year; is landscaping a resident-owned vacant lot for community use (the city is supplying \$5,000 in materials and the remainder will be provided through in-kind donations); and is partnering with an elementary school to upgrade its campus garden.

Garden Water Use Policy

To maintain a successful garden it is necessary to have adequate access to affordable water. The garden committees believed the gardens should be treated similarly to other places designated for recreational activity. The City Council approved a policy, suggested by the city's Nutrition Council and developed by city staff, to provide free water to the community gardens, with the conditions that drip irrigation be used and all community gardeners be trained in water conservation.

Benefits

To date, the nutrition education benefits extend beyond the gardens to the community, through the design of a program to increase neighborhood accessibility and visibility of healthful food and physical activity options. Garden leaders have recruited and trained 50 residents to be *Promotoras* (educators), who have provided nutrition education classes and workshops to over 2,000 residents.

The gardens create a neighborhood. Neighbors become more aware of each other. The benefits keep on going—creating family time and growing gardens.

Lori Holt Pfeiler, Mayor, City of Escondido

Additional benefits derived from the Nutrition Council's work include neighborhood improvements (e.g., sidewalk gutters), increased social capital (e.g., enhanced community connections and cross-cultural activities), and economic benefits (e.g., increased property values). Diverse individual skills (e.g., gardening, negotiation, policy development, and garden management) were improved, which cultivated a sense of empowerment. Intergroup understanding has been enhanced and more respectful relationships between city government and residents are being fostered.

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Toronto, Canada Food Policy Council

The City of Toronto, Canada, is the fifth largest city in North America with 2.48 million residents. The city's business hub thrives as the nation's largest employment center. It is also known as one of the most multicultural cities in the world. The city boasts five different Chinatowns and has the largest Italian population outside of Italy.

Toronto is also considered a forerunner in community health, the focus of which began in 1984 when the city sponsored a conference that launched the international Healthy Cities and Communities movement. When Toronto's Healthy City Project began in 1989, it reflected this shift in thinking regarding responsibility for community health, i.e., local government and communities work collaboratively through broad community participation, multisectoral involvement, local government commitment and healthy public policy.¹⁴

In 1991, the City of Toronto furthered its commitment to community health by creating the Toronto Food Policy Council. The Policy Council's mission is to *partner with business and community groups to develop policies and programs promoting food security, with the goal of a food system that fosters equitable food access, nutrition, community development and environmental health.*

The Policy Council is overseen by the Toronto Public Health Department and is made up of city councillors and volunteers from diverse groups representing consumers, business, farms, labor, anti-hunger advocacy, faith groups and community development. The Policy Council works to address food system problems by developing and proposing policies on behalf of the community, through various city departments. The Council has no authority to pass or enforce laws. It is able to complete its programs and activities with minimal staffing.

In 2000, the Toronto City Council voted to become a food-secure city. The following year, the City Council adopted the Toronto Food Charter with the food security definition that *every Toronto resident should have access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food.*





Community gardening is an accessible policy idea for cities.

The Policy Council's accomplishments are long and varied. Two of their most recent endeavors include: 1) taking edible, "ugly" fruits and vegetables to area food banks; and 2) teaching homeless teens how to cook using healthy foods and recipes.

Over the last decade, the Policy Council's accomplishments have included the following:

- Food and hunger advocacy—increased access to affordable food, developed food policy, and published 12 discussion papers
- Land preservation and urban planning—worked with the city to plan in a way that is conducive to preserving farmland and reducing sprawl
- Economic development—built a food processing center to create jobs and promote an environmentally positive approach to food processing, and promoted farmers' markets

Food policy must be multi-sector, cross-cultural and win-win. It can't just be public health—it has to be a citywide commitment of city staff, the community and elected officials.

Wayne Roberts, Project Coordinator, Toronto Food Policy Council

- Urban agriculture and food waste recovery—supported revising the city's urban infrastructure to create an environmentally sound food system and supported composting for urban agriculture and community gardening
- Community gardens—expanded the city's community gardens to 50 and conducted workshops for parents and teachers

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Other Policies

The following is a sampling of current healthy eating and physical activity policies, showcasing the variety of opportunities cities have to develop policies unique to their culture and circumstances. For contact information on the following policies, visit www.civicpartnerships.org.

Austin-Travis County, Texas Food Policy

In 1995, Austin, Texas, established the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Council as a response to inadequate food access for low-income residents. The Food Policy Council's goals include: access to supermarkets, store quality, alternative retail formats, local food production and food education. Accomplishments include direct bus routes to supermarkets and community garden development with reasonable costs for water and implementation.¹⁴

Berkeley, California Food and Nutrition Policy

Berkeley passed California's first municipal food and nutrition policy in September 2001. The policy was drafted by the city, with the leadership of its own Public Health Department, the Berkeley Food Policy Council, and other collaborators. Its purpose is to *help build a more complete food system based on sustainable regional agriculture that fosters the local economy and assures that all people of Berkeley have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.*

The voluntary municipal policy encourages citywide support for local sustainable agriculture and promotes equal access to fresh, affordable, high quality produce.

Hartford, Connecticut Advisory Commission on Food Policy

In 1991, the City Council created the City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. The Commission's purpose is to *integrate all agencies of the city in a common effort to improve the availability of safe and nutritious food at reasonable prices for all residents, particularly those in need.* Accomplishments include: attracting new supermarkets and publishing price comparison surveys (saving shoppers up to 18 percent on their groceries); long-term leases for community gardens; and teacher training on the value of the School Breakfast Program (increasing participation by 35 percent district-wide).¹⁴

Lincoln, California **Western Placer Unified School District**

The Lincoln Western Placer Unified School District started the Farm-to-School Salad Bar with locally grown produce. The schools' salad bars are provided to students as a nutritious alternative instead of the high-fat, nutrient-weak foods typically found in school cafeterias. The program is modeled after a Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District program, which began in 1997. The district plans to support the program beyond the \$25,000 grant funding they have from the California Department of Education's Linking Education, Activity and Food grant (LEAF).

Los Angeles, California **Unified School District Soda Ban**

Throughout the U.S., school district contracts with soda companies are contributing to the already high youth consumption of soft drinks.¹⁵ These contracts, many of which prevent schools from altering their beverage policies for up to a decade, give soda companies exclusive selling rights.¹⁶ Starting in 2004, the Los Angeles Unified School Districts, will prohibit soft drinks on all of its 677 campuses during school hours. This landmark decision has created a stir because many financially strained districts rely on this revenue for extracurricular activities. The district plans to release a report in early 2003 examining alternative means for fund recovery.

Vista High School, California **Vending Machine Policy**

San Diego County's Vista High School has adopted a policy to eliminate junk food vending machine contracts from its campus. Purchasing 17 vending machines, the high school is providing its 3,500 students with healthy alternatives such as yogurt, fruit and vegetable plates, bagels and salads. Foods were chosen based on taste-testing focus groups with students. Sodas are still available but at a higher price than water, juice and milk. The two-year project has been a financial success, with the machines grossing approximately \$25,000 per month and averaging a \$6,000 per month profit, which is twice the profit received under contracts.



Student gardeners from San Bernardino's Victoria Elementary School.

San Bernardino, California **Food Policy Council And Vacant Lots Policy**

Food Policy Council

The City of San Bernardino Food Policy Council was established in 2000. The Food Policy Council was created with the mission to *improve the availability and access to nutritionally adequate, appropriate, affordable, and safe food for all San Bernardino residents through collaboration and advocacy*. The Policy Council has established seven school district gardens with the help of the City Parks and Recreation staff. Nearly 500 students take advantage of the opportunities to learn about good nutrition and gardening.

Involving the county health department is a must.

They have so many resources and ideas, including evaluation.

Linda Ceballos, Environmental Projects Manager, City of San Bernardino

With the abundance of food produced, students are also able to extend the benefits by taking the produce home to their families. In addition, students are also increasing their physical activity by spending an average of three hours a week working in the garden.

Vacant Lots Policy

In 2002, the City Council approved the Vacant Lot Beautification Program Guidelines for public use of private land and city-owned vacant lots. A cross-department committee of representatives from Code Compliance, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development Agency, and the City Administrator's Office was formed to develop the criteria for gardens or pocket parks on vacant private property. Based on the adopted guidelines, City Council members recommend lot beautification projects in their respective wards, which are then prioritized by the committee and voted on by the City Council. A lot from each of the city's seven wards will be chosen for beautification in early 2003.

Policy Resources

Websites

Active Living by Design—www.activelivingbydesign.org—Designed to develop novel methods for increasing physical activity through public policies, community design and communications strategies.

California 5 a Day for Better Health! Campaign—www.ca5aday.com—Provides information on establishing healthy eating through the consumption of five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

California Food Policy Advocates—www.cfpa.net—Offers information on how to improve access of nutritious and affordable food to low-income Californians for increased health and well-being.

California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families—www.dhs.ca.gov/cpns—Provides information on the Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section's healthy eating and physical activity programs.

California Physical Activity and Health Initiative—<http://nurseweb.ucsf.edu/iha/pahi.htm>—Makes available information on increasing physical activity for those over 50 years old, in the workplace and the community.

California Project LEAN—www.dhs.ca.gov/lean—Encourages healthy eating and physical activity through education, policy, environment, research and collaboration.

Center for Civic Partnerships—www.civicpartnerships.org—Provides policy publications on nutrition and physical activity, and offers consultation on technical assistance for developing policy.

Center for Public Health Advocacy—www.publichealthadvocacy.org—Promotes healthy eating and physical activity through policy.

Community Food Security Coalition—www.foodsecurity.org—Provides information about food security programs and policies using creative community-based solutions.

Health Policy Coach—www.healthpolicycoach.org—Provides information on policy development and implementation as well as numerous policy case studies and examples.

Prevention Institute—www.preventioninstitute.org—Established to advocate for prevention of diseases, such as those related to physical inactivity and poor nutrition, to enhance community well-being.

Take Action!—www.ca-takeaction.com—Take Action! is a free 10-week worksite health program designed to increase physical activity at the workplace.

United States Department of Agriculture's Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services—www.fns.usda.gov/fncs—Designed to ensure access for all Americans to nutritious food and physical activity options, including information on policies and services.

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Special thanks to the communities profiled in this guide and the many individuals who contributed to its development.



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Layout: Wallrich Landi Integrated Marketing Communications, Sacramento, CA

Support: Principal funding provided by USDA's Food Stamp Program, an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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The Center for Civic Partnerships

The Center for Civic Partnerships is a collective of programs and services focusing on community and organizational development through technical assistance, educational programs, publications, resource brokering, the California Healthy Cities and Communities Network, and consultation. The Center is part of the Public Health Institute.

The Public Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting health, well-being and quality of life for all people through research and evaluation, training and technical assistance, and building community partnerships.

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Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section

California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families

The *California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families* (Network) is housed in the State Department of Health Services' Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section (CPNS) in Sacramento. The Network was created as a response to a 1995 United States Department of Agriculture initiative that sought to improve dietary practices among low-income households in California. It is a public/private partnership that employs broad-based social marketing techniques to reach large numbers of people in its nutrition education and physical activity promotion campaign. The mission of the Network is to create innovative partnerships so that low-income Californians are enabled to adopt healthy eating and physical activity patterns as part of a healthy lifestyle. The Network currently funds over 130 projects, including Local

Incentive Awardees (LIAs), faith and food security projects, California Project LEAN regions, and 5 a Day-Power Play! regions. Network partners serve as "ambassadors" to deliver 5 a Day and physical activity messages and to promote policy and physical environmental changes which help low-income families eat more fruits and vegetables, be more active, and participate in USDA nutrition assistance programs.

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